

JAPAN CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY NEWS

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GOVERNMENT PLANS REVISION OF "RELIGIOUS JURIDICAL PERSON" LAW

Two articles in a recent Christian Newspaper (Kirisuto Shinbun) (July 4) point toward future difficulty between religious bodies and the government. Both report on a current Liberal-democratic party intention to revise the post-war "religious juridical person" law. In substance the two articles report the following:

For a period of time, the Liberal-democratic party committee, headed by Azuma Matsunaga, has been meeting with representatives of Buddhist, and Soren groups to seek their opinion on possible revision of the law. Christian groups, through a "Christian league," have been concerned about possible change of status of certain shrines under this law, and on July 8 all representatives of various denominations met to discuss this problem with the party committee. Two representatives of a third committee, the well-known Zenta Watanabe and Ichi Ishizaki, were also invited to attend.

At a previous meeting on June 25 at the Christian center, the chairman of the Christian league, Mr. Nishimura, and the secretary, Mr. Kizawa, had urged each Christian group to study the problem and formulate its opinion before meeting with the party committee. In particular, the league is hampered by its own type of organization -- as a body designed for a means of communication between Christian groups, it lacks in itself any delegated power for united action. Yet, from the outside, it is considered to be representative of the Christian world.

The problem is further complicated by the contradictory declared and the whispered reasons for the attempted revision. The Liberal-democratic party has declared that the present law is deficient at two points: (1) the government has no right to supervise or investigate religious bodies" which meet certain conditions: and (2) religious bodies thus recognized are said to be of "public benefit" and therefore non-taxable. But in recent cases in the Kansai area (Osaka, Kobe), tax offices have found certain religious bodies questionable and urged government action as a counter-measure to their growth and activities.

The whispered reasons are more complicated. The late Mr. Hiroyasu of the religious department, Ministry of Education, pointed out that Japan is one of the few countries in the world which lacks control over religious groups. Interest in revising the bill by the Diet has been allegedly aroused by the extreme proselytizing of one religious body. At that time, the question of government power over religious groups was raised, and the party in power cited that present law as preventing it from any action. However, the subsequently appointed committee of the Diet made this conclusion: while the law must be re-written its general intention must be retained.

The Liberal-democratic party, disappointed with this report, formed its own committee to prepare for a revision of the law. According to the newspaper Chugai Nippo, May 26, the Liberal-democratic party promised the Ise Shrine that the law would be changed and the shrine granted special status. Thus, it is commonly felt that needed supervision over religions is only a camouflaged reason for the more important desire to gain special status for certain shrines, i.e. Ise and Atsuta, Shrines, which have special meaning for the royal family, and Yasukuni Shrine, which had national significance in the past and is now the central "resting place" of souls of all those who sacrificed themselves for emperor and country. This attempt at future "spiritual re-mobilization" has already been opposed not only by Christians but also by many well-informed people who see it as the first link of a new chain of thought control.

CHRISTIANS OPPOSE NEW SECURITY PACT, NUCLEAR ARMS, POLICE BILL

What is at heart a question of how well-suited the constitution of Japan is to the present national and world-situation has been focused in three areas. The Kishi government, in its greatest defeat, had to abandon temporarily its greatly desired "Police Bill" revision last year. But intended re-submission of this bill, plus the current talks between the U.S. and Japan for a new Security Treaty, have led to renewed public opposition on many levels. Included in the objects of attack are also nuclear arms bases in Japan.

Within the Kyodan, particular meetings with these results have occurred. On June 22 and 23 in Sendai, representatives from six eastern yokus (regional groups) met under the leadership of Chairman Nomuto, Kyodan Social Action committee, and Secretary Nakayama. It was decided that Christians should (1) join the peace march and mass meeting forbidding the use of the H and A bombs; (2) unequivocally oppose the nuclear arming of Japan; (3) register opposition to any revision of the treaty with the U.S. or of the constitution; (4) pray for normalization of relations between Korea and Japan; (5) in order to protect the liberty of the the people oppose both the government protection of Ise Shrine (see above) and the police bill which is to be re-submitted.

Positive action urged included (1) encouraging ministers and laymen to participation in social problems; (2) participation in community chest activity as well as offerings for social work; (3) setting up a mutual aid organization for ministers through the kyoku and Kyodan.

Similar concern was also voiced at a meeting of the Occupational Evangelism Special Committee, June 23 to 26, at the Canadian Academy in Kobe. More than ten leaders and thirty five committee members were concerned with the theme: "The Japanese Laborer and the Church," and the main address on this topic was given by Geichiro Shimada, Doshisha University. Speaking for the labor unions ("Present Problems of the Japanese Labor Movement") was Mr. Isamu Kato, Tokyo area committee head of the United Oil-Mine Workers Labor Union.

In the following discussion, strong feeling toward the government's present policies became evident. In particular, the current movement toward revision of the U.S. -Japan treaty was opposed and post-cards were sent to all churches and leaders expressing these following ideas: "While the government maintains that it seeks only to correct its present dependence upon the U.S. by removal of the unilateral nature of the treaty and restoration of autonomy, the real purpose is to increase Japan's defense power. This is already evidenced by the current fiscal budget in which the defense budget is double last year's amount, or 900 billion yen. Inevitable involvement in war is the logical outcome of such a policy, with complete mutilation of the peace constitution. With the time of signing the new agreement quite near, Premier Kishi seems to seek approval of the Diet this fall in a special session. Coupled with this would be renewed attempt to pass the Police Bill.

This committee therefore urges the church, in the interest of the church and for the possibility of spreading the gospel as well as for the peace of the world, that it is impossible to be mere spectators. Rather, it must join with other movements for peace and cultural bodies to work for these objectives." (Also translated and abbreviated from Christian Newspaper, July 4)

FIFTH LACOUR EVANGELISM GROUP WELCOMED TO JAPAN

On July 9, a welcoming committee from the Kyodan met the arriving Lacour evangelism team at Haneda Airport. Led by Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence Lacour, of the Methodist Church Board of National Missions, thirty four ministers and six wives, have come to serve in 34 evangelism centers. On July 10, the group was formally welcomed at the Christian Center in Tokyo, followed by sight-seeing on July 11. Various Tokyo churches were visited on July 12 with orientation on July 13, after which groups dispersed to their future work centers. Working fraternally with pastors and supervisors, the evangelistic team members will serve through preaching, Bible study, and in special ways until September 2. Returning to Tokyo at that time, a summary of the work will be held before the return to the United States by airplane.

Although members in the team are welcomed from any denomination in the U.S., this year's group includes pastors from these denominations: 1-Methodist; 7-Presbyterian; 1-Congregational; 1-Community church; 1-evangelical and Reformed; 2-Disciples; and 1-United Protestant. The work in Japan is under the direction of the United Church of Christ (Kyodan), opening new evangelistic centers or continuing to work at previous centers.

Because of the large number of team members this year, the number of centers have been increased by ten over last year; work at twenty three present centers will be continued with an additional eleven new centers to be opened.

In welcoming this fifth Lacour group, the Rev. Kikaku Shimamura, chairman of the General Evangelism committee, said: "Before there have been individual great men such as Jones and Graham. Dr. Lacour has brought a new method of evangelism which is a test case. After studying the individual situation in each case a man fitted for that area has been sent in: some for rural work; some to an industrial area; some to business or to an urban area. In this way organic evangelism like the harmony of an orchestra has been developed and it is hoped that this pattern will be extended and open the way for such evangelism in Japan."

The chairman of the Central Committee for Lacour Evangelism is the Rev. Isamu Omura. He declared: "The Lacour Evangelism is a pioneer type of evangelism and has brought a real benefit and is recognized in the church. ---Through their experience, they gave this church new meaning as it is stepping into the second century. In particular, honor must be paid to those who piloted this project: Mr. and Mrs. Lacour, whose love, zeal, and generosity without stint were given to evangelism in Japan and brought the present fruit. We are grateful that the Japanese church was given these persons and this fruit." The Rev. Omura also announced that all ministers who have taken part in the project during its five years will be given a memorial album, with a pictorial and printed record of the work which has been done at all centers. According to present plans, this is to be the final year of this evangelistic effort although it is hoped that it will be continued under difference auspices.

NCC ANNOUNCES CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION PLANS

In announcing the centennial celebration plans, the National Christian Council of Japan has designated November 1-8, 1959 as "Anniversary Week - The Hundredth Anniversary of Protestant Mission in Japan." The week's program will include the following events: On Sunday, November 1, all Protestant churches in Japan will hold special services commemorating the centennial. In the afternoon a Church School Rally will be held at the New Hibiya Music Hall.

Monday, November 2, is set for honoring special guests: all retired missionaries who have served in Japan, representatives from every missionary board with work in Japan, and the WCC, IMC, and EACC delegates have been invited to this celebration and will be received and congratulated for their work. In the evening at the Fujimi-cho Church, Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft will speak on "Theology of Mission" a special lecture for pastors. Events on Tuesday and Wednesday 3-4, center in the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium: on Tuesday, the Centennial service will be at one o'clock, with the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Japan and Vice-chairman of the NCC, Hinsuke Yashiro, preaching. At the Anniversary Celebration immediately following, Dr. Takeshi Muto, Chairman of the NCC, will speak. A Centennial Banquet will be held in the Meiji Memorial Hall. At the evening Centennial Rally, the two speakers will be Dr. Zenta Watanabe, sometime professor of Aoyama Gakuin and noted Old Testament scholar, and Mr. Tokutero Kitamura, member of the Diet and former finance minister under the Independent party, president of the Kyobunkan. Especially to be honored are those baptized Christian who have spent 50 years or more in a Christian life, as well as two groups of pastors: those who have served for 50 years or over and those who have served for 40 years or over will be honored.

